Selling Free Software

Thank you for inviting to me speak this morning. I'm going to talk about *Selling Free Software*.

Have you ever heard of anyone trying to sell Free Software?

Well, I have taken on that job within the State, while working as the CIO for the Air Resources Board. It's not a real job, actually. It's more of a personal crusade.

I can tell you're puzzled**.**

First, you're wondering: why would a state employee want to sell free software?

Secondly, what is free software?

And **third**? Why would anyone want to buy software they can get for free?

You're thinking that the crusade I'm on is the equivalent of Don Quixote jousting with windmills.

Ah, but it's not. And here' s why.

Back in 1975 Bill Gates, the Chairman of Microsoft, wrote a computer program called BASIC. He started selling it. It was his. He wrote it. If he could find buyers....he could make a mint. And it turns out after nearly 30 years he's made himself over 50 billion dollars selling that program and others. Some you're familiar with, like Microsoft Office.

But it's been a challenge because people would copy his products illegally and give them away to friends for free. This was not good for business.

Gates has worked hard to stop the pirating of his software. In fact, as early as 1976 he wrote a newsletter telling his BASIC users they were thieves for stealing his software. He's been admonishing and

chasing thieves ever since. He asked, "Who can afford to do professional (programming) work for nothing?

The answer came in 1991, when another guy   by the name of Linus Torvalds,   a Swede living in Finland,   wrote a computer program called Linux.   Now,   in developing his program   Linus published his work on the Internet   and pleaded   for anyone   and everyone on the Internet to help him improve it.

Almost overnight,   he had thousands of programmers   helping to build his program. He encouraged users   to copy his program. In fact, he told them to copy it,   develop it, and share it.

He was   one of the first developers   of what we now call free software, or more technically, Open Source.

The software   is available on the Internet for anyone to download and use.   You can get free word processors, spreadsheets, all kinds of stuff.

Linus' program   is very good, highly reliable, and supported by enthusiasts,   worldwide.   Major corporations, like IBM, have joined in and spend millions annually to advance the program.

As a result,   Linux is gaining marketshare. The use of Torvalds' program is spreading so quickly   that Microsoft is beginning   to lose some sales, even though it's lowering its prices.

So, what am I trying to do   selling free software?

I'm trying to help Arnold save money   spent on Information Technology by encouraging   state departments and their IT staff   to start using Free Software products, like Linux. My department has saved over $500K in the last couple of years by using virtually free software. The FTB and Cal/Trans have had similar experiences.

But   I have to confess, it's a tough sell. Lots of information technology professionals believe   that if something is free   it can't be too good. Worse, they say, if it's not Microsoft, or Oracle, or some other commercial product,   it won't work for them.

However, the world market is telling us something quite different. As I mentioned, the growth rate of Linux is well into double digits.

Here's my sales pitch to state departments: Give free software a chance. If you don't like it, toss it. It doesn't cost you anything to try.

And if you do like it, then you can think about how you're going to spend all that software money you're saving.

Further, you can revel in the promotions you'll probably receive for having been so shrewd to invest in an IT solution that saved your department's budget.

And, by the way, the Governor will thank you as well. I think I've got a crusade that's winnable.

Can I interest you in a free copy of Linux?